

EPI Update for Friday, December 16, 2011

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE)

Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **Cold weather brings risk of falls**
- **Staying safe while staying warm this winter**
- **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

Cold weather brings risk of falls

Winter weather not only brings the cold and flu season, but other health risks as well. Unintentional falls are the second leading cause of injury death in Iowa behind motor vehicle crashes and are the leading cause of death for Iowans over the age of 65. Fortunately, falls are preventable. Please share the following information with your patients as they prepare for winter weather:

- Be sure walkways are kept clear of snow and ice to reduce slippery surfaces; purchase traction devices for boots (such as Yak-Traks), and look *before* you start walking on an outside surface.
- Fall risk factors for older Iowans include medication combinations that may affect balance, declining vision, reduced strength in lower extremities, and unsafe home conditions.
- Encourage seniors to "fall-proof" their homes for areas that may be slippery or have low-lighting, maintain their bone health through strengthening exercises, and use assistive devices (such as canes) for stability when walking.

For more information on preventing falls, visit www.idph.state.ia.us/FallPrevention/.

Staying safe while staying warm this winter

As temperatures drop and home heating bills rise, more people look to alternate methods of keeping warm indoors. The use of space heaters and fireplaces to stay warm increases the risk of household fires and carbon monoxide poisoning. Every year, more than 500 people in the U.S. die from accidental CO poisoning.

Please remind patients to always follow the manufacturer's instructions and remember these safety tips:

- Use fireplaces, wood stoves, or other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and if they do not leak flue gas into the indoor air space.
- Use only the type of fuel your heater is designed to use and don't substitute.
- Do not place a space heater within three feet of anything that may catch fire, such as drapes, furniture, or bedding; never cover your space heater.
- Store a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher near the area to be heated.
- Protect yourself from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning by installing a battery-operated CO detector.
- Never use generators, grills, camp stoves, or similar devices indoors.

The Iowa Statewide Poison Control Center can provide guidance to health care providers on management of CO poisoning cases by calling 800-222-1222.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is reportable to IDPH if there is a blood-carbon monoxide level equal to or greater than 10 percent carboxyhemoglobin or its equivalent in a breath analyzer test, or a clinical diagnosis regardless of any test results. It should be reported electronically through IDSS.

More information on carbon monoxide poisoning is available in the EPI Manual at www.idph.state.ia.us/idph_universalhelp/main.aspx?system=IdphEpiManual and from the IDPH website www.idph.state.ia.us/eh/carbon_monoxide.asp.

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

The Laboratory Response Network and State Hygienic Laboratory announce the debut of a new online training course. “Anatomy of a Foodborne Outbreak” is a short course that walks the learner through a realistic E. coli O157 outbreak, and demonstrates the importance of laboratory testing.

For more information, visit www.shl.uiowa.edu/educationoutreach/sentclinlabtraining/.

Have a healthy and happy week!

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